

# Bonded For Life

By Caroline Charland



Some call it bunny bonding, others call it bunny dating, and it is also known as the bonding ritual.

No matter what you call it, it is something most of us need to go through at one time or another if you are a rabbit lover.

Because rabbits are such social creatures, they should always live with at least one other rabbit. Once your rabbit is bonded to another rabbit you will enjoy hours of watching them cuddle, groom, play, and sleep together. Also, your rabbits will have each other for companionship, especially in illness and old age.

The fact is that you can not just put another rabbit with your rabbit though, as they are very territorial, and usually a serious fight will break out.

If you do not have any rabbits and are considering adopting a rabbit or two, it is best to get a bonded pair or threesome, that way the bonding is already done for you. This way you can spare yourself the time of match making and daily bonding sessions that you would otherwise have to go through.

Your local rabbit rescue or shelter will often have many rabbits that are already bonded. Rabbits like to live in groups, so you could consider getting two or more that have been living together, as they are already bonded.

If you already have a rabbit, then you should seriously consider getting him a friend.

Rabbits that live alone often get very sad and lonely. Even if you are able to spend time everyday with your rabbit, he will still be lonely at night or when you leave the house. Rabbits, unlike some other animals, will stay bonded to their human even when you get them rabbit friends of their own. Just think, now instead of one rabbit adoring you, you will have two or three!

There is no one way to bond rabbits together, but there are some tips and proven rules to follow.

Before we get into all the bonding tactics there is some preparation to do to make sure it will work.

The rabbits must be spayed or neutered before starting the bonding process. If your rabbit is not already fixed then you should find a rabbit knowledgeable veterinarian to spay or neuter your rabbit.

Having your rabbit spayed or neutered has many benefits, the obvious one being to prevent unwanted litters from being born. This will also prevent your rabbits from spraying urine to mark their territory. Some rabbits develop bad behavioral problems when they are not neutered. Also, many female rabbits will die at an early age of uterine cancer if not spayed. It is important to take out the ovaries and the uterus.

Same-sex rabbits being bonded should also be spayed or neutered, as they will continue to fight when they are not fixed.

I have found that male/female is the easiest to bond, but I have also bonded male/male and female/female.

If you already have one rabbit and would like to find him a friend, it is best to contact your local rabbit rescue group. Sometimes these groups will do the bonding for you, although that will mean leaving your rabbit with them for a week or two. The benefit is that you will get back two rabbits which are in love!

You can also go to your local animal control or shelter. Often people do not realize that many wonderful rabbits end up in shelters. By adopting from a shelter you are truly saving a life. I suggest that you quarantine your shelter rabbit for two weeks before starting the introductions to your rabbit.

Some people like to take their bunny on a bunny date to see if he gets along with a particular bunny. This may work sometimes, but most of the time rabbits are going to be either territorial and want to fight, or so scared that they just sit next to each other panting.

Getting Started:

- Once your rabbits are both spayed or neutered, you will need to set up two areas for each rabbit to live until bonded.
- An exercise pen works nicely as you can put in a litter box, food and water crocks, and lots of toys.
- If the two or three rabbits you are going to bond have never met, it is best not to let them see each other until you start the bonding.

There are some important things to remember when you start the bonding process:

First, it is very important to introduce the rabbits in neutral territory (somewhere neither rabbit has been before). The reason for this is because rabbits are very territorial and they will try to protect their territory from another rabbit by fighting.

Sometimes it is hard to find a spot where your rabbit has not been, especially as many rabbits have the run of the house.

When looking for a neutral spot, keep in mind that the bath tub works well, as it is also a little scary.

When you start bonding, place both rabbits next to each other in the tub (no water). You need to be in total control of the situation by resting your arm across the back of both rabbits and stocking their heads at the same time.

Because this is strange and unusual to the rabbits, they will often find comfort in each other. Because they have never been in this area before, they are not worried about protecting their territory.

It is best to have lots of short meetings with the rabbits. Try to schedule two ten-minute bonding periods per day to start with, increasing each meeting by about five to ten minutes, depending on how well they are getting along.

There is such a thing as love at first sight, when two rabbits just meet and never go through all of the usual bonding behaviors. Rabbits can be bonded in about seven days, but it may take weeks.

I will take you through, step-by-step, telling you what to expect and what to look out for. Remember that every rabbit is different, and I am just going by what I have found to be the most common.

Some rules to remember:

- Never leave the rabbits alone for even a second, if you are not controlling the situation a nasty fight, resulting in serious injuries, could break out when you are not there to stop it.
- Always do the bonding in neutral territory.
- Always in a small space.
- Learn your rabbits' body language so you can detect their actions before they happen.
- Be patient.

## Day 1

- Put both rabbits in the bath tub, side by side. Make sure they can not get to each other by placing your arm across their backs. Gently stroke their heads. Do this for about ten minuets.
- Repeat the above again the same day.

## Day 2

- Do the same as above, extending the time to about fifteen to twenty minuets.
- Later the same day, do the same again, except this time do it a little longer.

Repeat the meetings twice every day, each day extending the time together. Before you know it, you will notice that one of the rabbits is being submissive by putting its head down. In bunny language this means PLEASE LICK MY HEAD! When the other bunny realizes this, and starts licking, the bonding has begun.

Now the bonding gets a little easier. When you have them in the bath tub, let them run around. If one rabbit gets on top of the other as if mating, you can let this continue as long as there is no fighting or hair pulling. The reason this is happening is to figure out who is head bunny. It is not the male, or the largest bunny that is always on top.

Once one rabbit has been submissive, by putting its head down for a good licking, the other rabbit will want the same thing. This does not always happen the way we would like. Sometimes we have a stubborn rabbit that refuses to do any licking.

This just means the bonding process may take a little longer.

Before you know it, the other rabbit will put its head down for a good licking. Then both rabbits will start to groom each other.

This is a great sign. You still have to have controlled bonding sessions, but it means you are closer to having two bonded rabbits.

It is a good idea to put some veggies in with the rabbits so they can eat together. Start extending the time they are together, and before long you will have two rabbits that are in love.

Now that your rabbits are bonded in the bathtub, you need to increase their territory. You want to do this slowly and in small areas, getting a little bigger as you go along.

I suggest using the bathroom floor as an area to start with, doing the same as you were in the bath tub. Once your rabbits are fine in that area, take them into another room and put them in an exercise pen to see how they do. More than likely they will be fine, but just to be sure you should supervise.

Once they are fine in an ex-pen, you can start putting them in a small room and eventually let them have the run of the house.

When your rabbits are bonded it will be the most rewarding thing you have ever seen. They will love each other, groom each other, play together, and sleep together.

Once you have a pair of bonded rabbits you should never let them be apart. They bond for life.

If one rabbit becomes ill and has to stay at the vet, it is very important to take the other rabbit along too. If you separate them they will pine for each other, and being apart can do more harm than good.

Many people ask if they should have more than one rabbit. All rabbits should live with at least one other rabbit. This isn't for the person to have more rabbits, but because rabbits should never live alone.

Rabbits should always be spayed or neutered before being bonded. Two un-neutered males will fight, two un-spayed females will fight.

Rabbits will bond to other animals, but it is not the same as being with another rabbit.

My dog loves my rabbits, and interestingly enough he has bonded to some of my foster rabbits that are waiting to go to a home with another rabbit. When thinking about having a dog around a rabbit you can never be too careful. Many people have called me to say "My dog was fine at first, and then he just went for the rabbits". This is not a situation you want to put a rabbit in. Some dogs do actually bond to rabbits, but you can never be too careful.

Cats also will bond to rabbits. You often find that house rabbits will go up to cats to say hello and the cat will take off into another room. If you have a cat around your rabbit, make sure you are clipping the cats' claws so that it can not scratch your rabbit.

Kittens and puppies are not suggested with rabbits, as all they want to do is play, and they see the rabbit as something to toss up in the air and have fun with.

Rabbits will bond very closely to people. Your rabbit will learn to know its name and will come when called. There are many things rabbits know, such as the refrigerator door opening for veggies. My rabbits are always right there, waiting for me to give them a veggie treat.

Some people are very close to their rabbit and are afraid that if they bond their rabbit to another rabbit they will lose the relationship they have with their rabbit. What generally happens is that you have the same great relationship, but with two rabbits instead of one!

Rabbits can be bonded into groups. I have fourteen rabbits all bonded and living together. This may take some time to do, but is it great to have that many rabbits living together and all getting along.

Signs that two rabbits are getting along are that, of course, they are not trying to kill each other. Also, that they are lying next to each other and grooming.

Signs that rabbits are not getting along are, of course, that they keep being territorial and keep fighting after lots of bonding time. Once in a while you will find rabbits that just do not like each other.

Sometimes there is love at first sight, which I wish happened every time. This is when two rabbits just fall in love. There is no fighting, just grooming and lying next to each other. They just fall in love!

Two rabbits do not take up any more room than one. Often people say “I just don’t have room for another rabbit”. If that is the case, then the area that their rabbit is living in is too small. I suggest that rabbits start off by living in a 4x4 foot exercise pen. Once they are used to their new surroundings, you can let them out to be house rabbits, living in your rabbit-proofed home. Rabbit-proofed meaning that there is nothing dangerous for them, such as poisonous plants, uncovered electrical cords, or animals that could harm them.

I have found over the years that time and patience is the most important thing when introducing any animal to another. I have heard many interesting stories of rabbits and birds being in love, rabbits and guinea pigs, rabbits and cats, and rabbits and dogs. When you are ready to find a friend for your rabbit, the best thing to keep in mind is the safety of your rabbit. Remember, other people may have told you about dogs or cats with rabbits, but that does not mean all dogs and cats will get along with rabbits. I have taken in rabbits that have been injured by cats and dogs in the same household. Just remember to use common sense, go slow, and take the time needed to find your bunny a bunny to love.



*At the Burrow we do bunny dating and help with bonding rabbits. Your rabbit/s do need to be spayed or neutered first. Come and visit us during our open hours. No appointment needed. We also offer bonding where you leave your rabbits with us to bond for ten days.*

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